

News Release



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Sussex County considers addressing ordinance

GEORGETOWN, Del. – Seconds and minutes count in an emergency. That's why firefighters, paramedics and police don't want to spend precious time circling through developments or poring over maps in order to find a house or business.

To aid those public safety workers in their mission, Sussex County Council on Tuesday, Oct. 4, introduced an ordinance that would, if approved, require houses and businesses in unincorporated Sussex to display their county-assigned 911 addresses. Failure to do so would prompt a warning, and could lead to fines of as much as \$100 a day.

County officials say the step is necessary to ensure that 911 addresses the county has spent years assigning – and is nearly finished distributing – are prominently displayed so emergency workers can do their jobs.

“This is critical to the health and safety of our county's residents,” said Matthew Laick, director of the Sussex County Mapping & Addressing Department. “If they need help, we want firefighters, paramedics and police to be able to find them quickly to administer that help.”

For the last several years, Sussex County has been readdressing more than 90,000 houses and businesses throughout the nearly 950-square-mile county. In the readdressing project, unique number and street name combinations – instead of vague rural routes and post office boxes – have been assigned to show the physical location of residences and businesses.

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Those physical addresses, once assigned, are then mapped so emergency personnel know where a particular house or business is located. The information is also stored in telephone company databases, so that when someone calls 911, the location from which they are dialing is displayed on a dispatcher's screen.

[Residents should check with their local telephone companies to verify that database records reflect the most up-to-date 911 addresses.]

The ordinance introduced Tuesday, among other things:

- Takes the rules for addressing in Sussex County, which have been policy up until now, and gives them the force of law.
- Sets an official, legal standard for the size and placement of house/business numbers as well as street signs.
- Creates a system to eliminate duplicate street and road names, particularly within the same fire districts and ZIP codes. For example, in the Rehoboth Beach fire district, there are three thoroughfares that carry "Canal" as part of their names. Preference would be given to those streets and roads that have the most addresses, as well as historical significance.
- Establishes penalties for those houses and businesses not displaying their 911 addresses. If emergency responders discover a 911 address is not being displayed, the property owner will be issued a certified letter and given 15 days to comply. After that, the owner would be assessed a \$50 fine. If no action is taken after two calendar weeks, a property owner could face a \$100-a-day fine.

County Administrator Robert L. Stickels said the ordinance is about doing what is in the best interest of the public.

"I realize a lot of people view this as an inconvenience," Stickels said of 911 addressing, and the transition from long-established rural post office boxes. "However, we strongly believe this is a necessary instrument in order for us to provide the quickest public safety response as possible."

A public hearing on the ordinance has been set for 11 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 25 in the council chambers, located inside the County Administrative Offices building, 2 The Circle, Georgetown. Anyone needing additional information can contact the Mapping & Addressing Department at (302) 855-1176.

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